SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 296.—Vol. XI. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 1, 1894. [Price One Penny.

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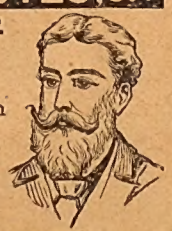

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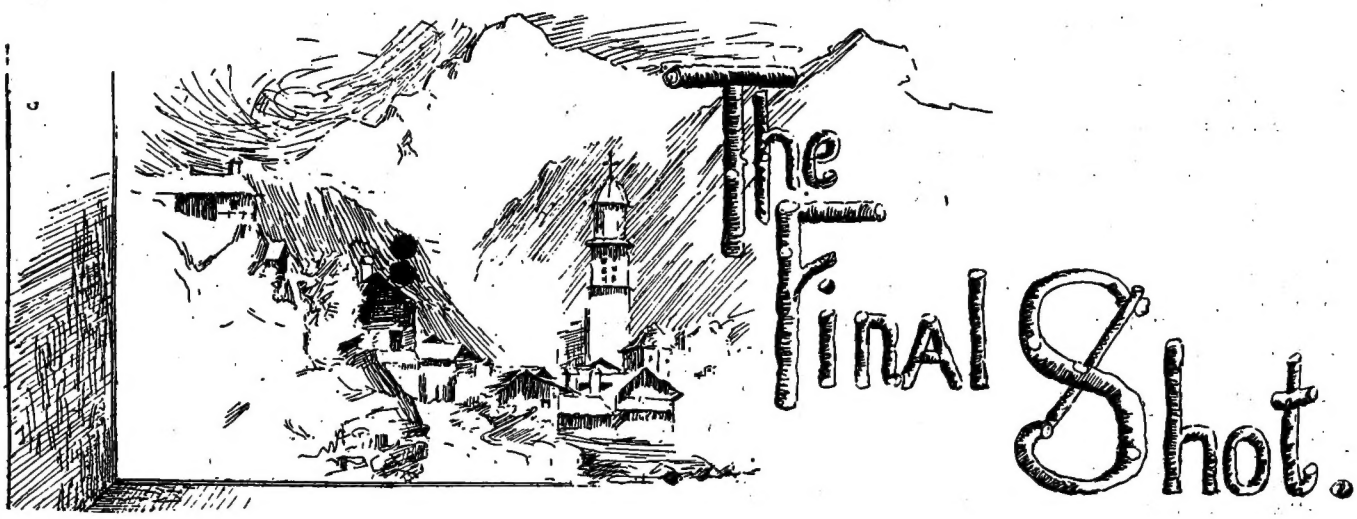
EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 296.—Vol. XI. *FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 1, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.



The Final Shot.

PART I.

WE were in garrison at the little town of Marska. You know what the daily life of an officer of a line regiment is; in the morning a company drill and riding; in the afternoon dinner with the commandant or in a Jewish restaurant; in the evening cards and punch—that is the daily routine. In Marska there was not a single family who kept open house, not one marriageable young lady. We passed our time in quarters, and only saw men in uniform.

One civilian, to be sure, was among us. He might have been thirty-five years of age, and yet we looked upon him as an old man. His remarkable attainments assured for him great respect in our eyes; besides, his habitual silence, his haughty nature, and his keen, sarcastic speech, exercised a great influence over our youthful imaginations. His past was surrounded by a certain mysterious vagueness. He appeared to be a Russian, and yet he bore a foreign name.

He had formerly served with the Huzzars, and been fortunate in promotion. No one knew why he had left the service and taken up his abode in that wretched village, where he lived frugally, yet was free with his money. He always went on foot, and invariably wore an old black great coat.

Nevertheless, his house was always open to the officers of our regiment. To be sure, his dinners consisted of only two or three dishes, prepared by an old pensioner-soldier; but there was always plenty of the best wine. No one knew anything of his circumstances, or of his source of income. He possessed some books, principally upon military subjects, and a few novels, which he gladly lent us. He never demanded their return, and, on the other hand, never gave back those which he himself borrowed.

His chief occupation was shooting with the pistol. The walls of his room were honeycombed with bullet holes. A splendid collection of pistols was almost the only thing of value the poor hut in which he lived contained beside the books. His skill with this weapon was truly incredible; and, had he asked it, I believe no one of us would have hesitated a moment in letting him shoot an apple from his head.

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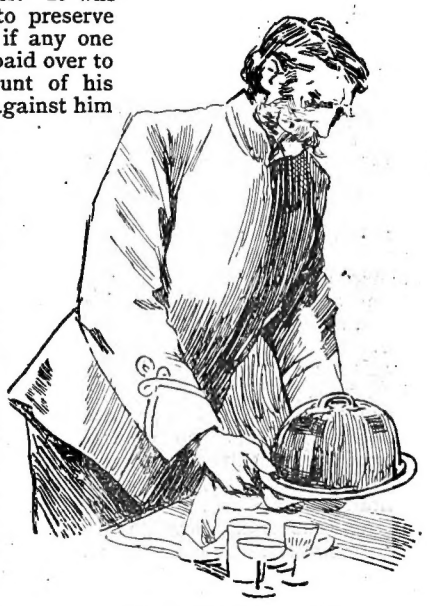
Sometimes the conversation turned upon duelling, and in this case Silvio—so we will call him—inevitably became silent, and gave only the briefest replies to questions put to him. It was evident that the subject was unpleasant to him. We concluded that the recollection of some victim of his deadly skill troubled him.

An unexpected occurrence astonished us all greatly.

One day ten officers of our regiment were at Silvio's house. After dinner, at which, as usual, we drank a great deal of wine, the cards were brought out. Silvio acted as banker. It was his custom at cards to preserve perfect silence, and if any one made a mistake he paid over to the banker the amount of his bet or it was entered against him on the board. This took place without a word. But on this occasion there was a young officer in the party, who had just entered our regiment.



Prepared by an old pensioner soldier.

In play he accidentally made a mistake, which threw him out of the game. Silvio took the chalk and noted the amount as usual. The officer thought an error had been made, and said so. Silvio went on with his dealing in silence. The officer lost his patience and angrily wiped out the score. Silvio

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calmly wrote it over again. Then, incensed beyond measure by the supposed insult and the laughter of his fellow-officers, the man snatched up a candlestick and hurled it at Silvio, who quickly threw his head on one side and let it pass. Then he rose to his feet, white with rage, and, turning his gleaming eyes on the young officer, said:

"Sir, leave this house at once, and thank God that this has happened under my roof."

None of us doubted the consequences of this occurrence, and we already looked upon our new comrade as a dead man. But the next day as we met in the messroom and wondered if the lieutenant were still alive, he came in himself. He had received no message from Silvio. We were astonished. So several days passed.

It appeared that Silvio did not intend to challenge the lieutenant. A superficial explanation was made, and peace again established. Such a course of action at once lowered him in the estimation of the younger officers, but, as the weeks passed, the event was almost forgotten, and Silvio again enjoyed his old influence and respect. But for myself I could not become reconciled.

On Tuesdays and Fridays, the regiment office was filled with officers, collected to receive their letters. Silvio's letters were put in the post bag of our regiment, so that he usually came in on post days. One day a letter was handed him, which he hurriedly tore open. His eyes sparkled while he ran it over.

"Gentlemen," said Silvio, "important business compels me to depart at once; I leave to-night. I hope you will not refuse to dine with me this evening for the last time." He turned to me and added, "I count upon your presence."

It was late when we rose from the table that night, for the wine had flowed more freely than ever. As the guests departed one by one, we bade Silvio good-bye. When I stepped up to shake hands he said to me in a low voice:

"I want to say a few words to you."

I remained behind after the others had departed. We sat down opposite each other, and began to smoke in silence. Silvio appeared troubled. His pale face, his gleaming eyes, and the clouds of smoke which surrounded him, gave him a truly demoniac appearance. Several moments passed, then he broke the silence:

"Perhaps we will never see each other again, and before I go I wish to correct the false opinion you have of me. You thought it strange that I did not demand satisfaction from that drunken lieutenant. You will admit that his life was in my power. If, however, I could have punished him for his insolence without endangering my own life, I would have done so."

I looked at him in astonishment. Such a confession was dumfounding.

"Unhappily I had not the right to place myself in danger. Six years ago a man insulted me, and he still lives.

"Yes, I challenged him," Silvio continued, answering my probable question, "and here is a memento of the duel."

He took down a little red gold-striped cap, in which, about an inch above the vizor, was a bullet hole.

"You are aware that I was with the Huzzars at Stanow. You know my character. I am accustomed to be at the head of everything, and in my younger days this was a passion with me. Duels were of daily occurrence in our regiment, and I had a hand in many, either as principal or second. My comrades adored me, and the heads of my regiment regarded me as an unavoidable evil.

"Just at that time a young man of rich, aristocratic family joined us. Never in my life have I seen such a fellow, so richly endowed by fate and nature. He was young, handsome, witty, jovial, of good name, and had plenty of money. You can imagine that my supremacy received a shock. At first, dazzled by my reputation, he sought to make friends with me. But I was very cool to him, and he turned away without the least apparent regret at my reception. I began to hate him.

"His success in the regiment and with the ladies drove me to desperation. I tried to find some occasion for strife, but his wit turned my assaults of words into laughter. Finally, at a ball on a Polish county estate, where he charmed even the hostess, who, I thought, was partial to me, I said some unsuitable words to him. He flared up in an instant and struck me. We were separated, and the same night set off for a place appointed for the meeting.

"I arrived just at day-break. My opponent came a little later, leisurely, on foot, in his shirt sleeves, and coolly eating cherries from his cap, which he had filled on the way.

"It was agreed that we should toss up for the first shot. With his usual good luck he won. He fired, and the bullet passed through my cap. At last his life was in my hands. I looked at him closely, to detect any signs of uneasiness in his face. No, he stood unconcernedly eating cherries from his cap, and throwing his stones toward me. Now and then they rolled almost to my feet. Then an evil thought came into my head. I lowered my pistol.

"'It appears,' I said, 'that at present you are not in a mood for dying. You prefer to breakfast. I will not disturb you.'

"'You are not disturbing me in the least,' he coolly replied; 'I beg of you to fire. Or, if it pleases you, the shot remains yours, and I am always at your service.'

"I told the seconds accordingly that I would reserve my shot, and so the meeting ended.

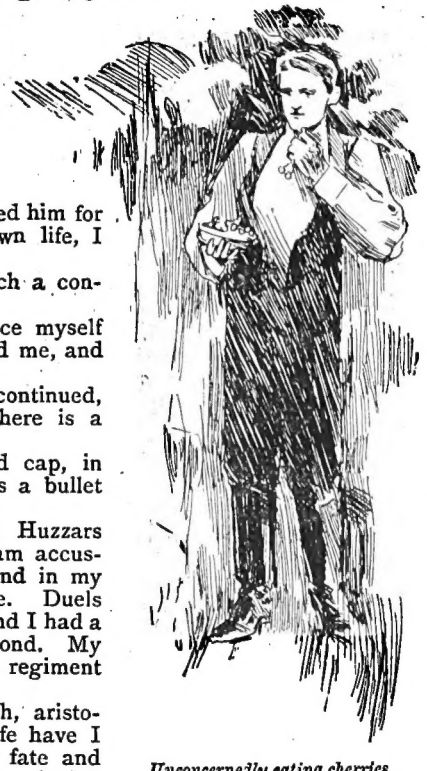
"I left the service, and came back here into the country. But no day has passed in which I have not thought of my revenge. Now my time has come."

Silvio drew from his pocket the letter he had received. It informed him that a certain person was about to marry a young and beautiful girl.

"I am going to Moscow," said Silvio. "We will see whether he will look death so coolly in the face before the wedding as he did then with his cherries."

With these words he rose, and throwing his cap on the floor, strode up and down the room like a tiger in his cage. Strange, opposing feelings overcame me as I watched him.

His servant came in and announced that the horses were ready, he pressed my hand warmly, then rushed out, jumped into the droschka, and in another minute was gone into the night.



Unconcernedly eating cherries from his cap.

PART II.

Several years passed, and circumstances compelled me to take up my abode in the regions of Stanow. I had but few neighbours, and, though busy with the superintendence of my estate, I led a rather lonely life.

About four versts away was the beautiful country seat of Countess Zaronski, which was in charge of her agent. But the spring following my arrival in the country I heard that the Countess and her husband were to pass the summer at their abode. The news was very welcome to me, and soon after their arrival I took the liberty, as the nearest neighbour and only other considerable landowner in that region, to call upon them.

A servant led me into the Count's reception-room, and went to announce my presence. The room was large, and furnished with all possible luxury. On the walls were cases well filled with books in elegant bindings, and rugs, bronzes, and

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pictures gave the place a comfortable and attractive appearance.

The door opened, and a handsome man of, perhaps, thirty-five entered. The Count received me in a most friendly and hearty manner, and, even before I could announce myself, welcomed me as a neighbour. His frank, easy manner soon banished the embarrassment I had at first felt. The Countess came in, and I was presented to her. She was, indeed, a beautiful woman, and in her presence I felt my first feeling of awkwardness and timidity returning. But they treated me so informally, so like an old acquaintance, that I felt once more reassured.

Meanwhile I looked at some of the books and pictures, and told them how welcome to my eyes were such things, for my house was but barely furnished, and a mansion had never been built on the place. One picture especially attracted my attention. It was a Swiss landscape, but it was not the painting itself that struck my eye, but rather the fact that right in the middle of the canvas were two bullet holes, one precisely above the other.

"A capital shot!" I remarked, turning to the Count.

"Yes," he said, "a very remarkable one. Do you care for shooting?"

"Well, I think I would not miss a card at thirty paces," I replied, glad a subject had been hit upon that was familiar to me. "Of course, with pistols you mean?"

"Really?" said the Countess, with a look of interest, and, turning to her husband, "And you, my dear, could you hit a card at that distance?"

"We will try it some day," answered the Count. "In my time I was not a bad shot, but I've not handled a pistol for four years."

"Well, in that case," I remarked, "I will venture that you will miss at twenty paces. Pistol shooting demands daily practice. I know that from experience. No, believe me, Count, a man must practice constantly or he becomes rusty. The best shot I ever knew never let a day pass without using his pistols—and generally took a few practice shots before each meal."

"And what sort of a marksman was he?" asked the Count.

"Well, for example, when he saw a fly on the wall he called out, 'Hullo, Knako, my pistols.' Knako brought him a loaded pistol. Piff, and the fly was smashed to bits."

"Remarkable skill," exclaimed the Count, "and what was his name?"

"Silvio, Count."

"Silvio," cried he, springing to his feet. "Did you know Silvio?"

"Know him! We were intimate friends. He was looked upon as one of our regiment. But I have not heard of him for five years. Then you, too, have known him?"

"Yes, I knew him—knew him well. Did he ever, perhaps, tell you of a strange occurrence——?"

"Do you mean of the blow a young fellow gave him at a ball——?"

"Did he tell you the name of this young fellow?"

"No—but, Count," I cried, suspecting the truth, "I beg your pardon—I did not know that you were the person."

"Yes, myself," answered the Count, somewhat confused. "The bullet holes in that picture painting are the mementoes of our last meeting."

"Please, dear," said the Countess, "don't speak of that. I shudder when I hear that story."

"No," answered the Count, "I must tell the gentleman all about it. It is but right that he should know how Silvio was avenged."

Mascha threw herself about my neck.

We sat down, and I listened with intense interest to the following narrative:—

"Five years ago we were married, and passed our honeymoon upon this estate. One evening, as we returned from a ride, I saw a travelling carriage at the door, and I was informed that a gentleman was waiting to see me. He had refused to give his name, and only said that he had business of importance to transact with me. I came to this reception-room and saw before me a man with dust-covered clothes and a long beard, standing by the chimney. I went up to him, but failed to recognise the features.

"'You do not know me, Count,' he said, with trembling voice.

"'Silvio,' I exclaimed, and I must confess that I felt my hair stand on end.

"'Yes, it is I,' he continued. 'I have one shot still to my credit and I have come to take it. Are you ready?'

"From a side pocket I saw the handle of a pistol protruding. I measured off twelve paces—the original distance—and stood in the corner over there. I begged him to shoot quickly, before my wife came in. He hesitated and demanded a light, as it was growing dark. Candles were brought. I closed the door and ordered that no one be admitted, and then again requested him to fire. He raised his pistol and aimed—I counted the seconds. I thought of her—a terrible moment passed—Silvio lowered his pistol.

"'I am sorry,' said he, 'but my pistol is not loaded with cherry stones—the ball is so heavy; but it occurs to me that this seems more like a murder than a duel. I am not accustomed to shooting unarmed men. We will begin again, and draw lots to see who shall shoot first.'

"My head swam—I believe I rejected the proposal—but finally a second pistol was loaded. We placed two pieces of paper in his cap—the one I had put a bullet through—and drew. I won a second time.

"'You have confounded good luck, Count,' said he with a smile which I shall never forget.

"I know not how it happened, nor through what means he compelled me to it, but I fired and hit this picture here."

The Count pointed to the landscape. His face was fiery red, but that of the Countess as white as a sheet.

"At any rate," continued the Count, "I shot, and missed, thank God! Then Silvio took aim (at that moment he looked almost like a fiend). Suddenly the door opened, and Mascha ran in and threw herself about my neck.

"Silvio let his pistol fall, and then raised it and took aim again.

"'No, I will not fire,' said Silvio. 'I am satisfied. I only wished to see you in pain and confusion. I compelled you to shoot at me. I am satisfied. You will remember me. I leave you alone with your conscience.'

"He took one step towards the door, but stopped at the threshold, cast one glance at the painting my ball had struck, and then fired at it almost without aiming, as he went out.

"My wife fainted. The servants did not dare to stop him, and looked after him in terror. He went down the steps, called to the coachman, and, before I could gain my presence of mind, was gone!"

The Count was silent.

So it was that I learned the end of a story, the beginning of which had greatly interested me. I have never seen the hero of it since. It is said that Silvio led a division of the revolutionists during the uprising of Alexander Ypsilenti, and fell at the battle of Shullein.

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MY NEIGHBOUR.

A FATIGUING journey up six long, winding flights of stairs carried me to the room I occupied in Lambert Street. Here I lived, in enjoyment of no end of fresh air, especially in winter, and a brilliant prospect up and down the street and over the roofs of the houses across the way.

I was studying painting at that time—learning to paint the landscapes and figure-pieces which I produce with so much ease and dispose of with so much difficulty.

At the head of the last flight of stairs in my lodging-house was a narrow passage-way, in which I was obliged to stop and recover my breath, after finishing the one hundred and thirty-nine steps that led to my paradise, before I could get my key into its lock; and into this passage-way open two doors, one of which, of course, belonged to my own room, and the other one to someone else's. But who this someone else was I was unable to find out. Was it a man or a woman? I was persuaded that it must be a woman, and as a woman I always used to think of her and speak of her to myself—and I thought and spoke of her often enough.

Of course I could have settled the question at once by knocking at her door and asking for a match, or by inquiring of my landlord, who occasionally honoured me with a friendly call; but I scorned resorting to such methods.

Every time I heard her door shut, I resolved she should not go out again without my seeing her, and I nearly fell into the street as I frantically attempted to reach far enough out of my window to see her as she came out of the street door.

The only communication I ever had with people in the house was an occasional conversation with the dust-coloured old woman who cleaned the windows and swept the halls.

A day came for cleaning my windows when it rained heavily, and I could not give the old woman a clear space by going out for a couple of hours, but told her to clean away and be as quick as she could, while I sat there and painted.

She had an eye for character, though, and told me the peculiarities of some of the lodgers, in a quaint way, nailing her sentences, now and then, with odd hard words, independently of the general text.

"Gentleman who's under you keeps 'imself quite to 'imself," she said. "Plants out queer herbs in boxes all the time, an' some of 'em on the balcony itself. P'r'aps 'e makes a kinder tea of 'em, or root-drink. Decoctifies."

"And who is in the room below that?" I inquired, more to make her talk than to satisfy any curiosity I had on the subject.

"Empty now. Two dark little gentlemen 'ad it for a fortnight—Jews, I fancy—an' as like one another as two spots o' dirt on this 'ere pane o' glass. Spoke a hard-biled kind o' tongue an' was furriners, most likely Polyanders."

I might have asked her about my next door neighbour, but refrained for fear my pretty romance would be destroyed by a description of a middle-aged spinster who wore glasses and wrought green roses in crewel-work.

When she had finished the windows and gathered up her cloths and pail, she paused an instant to give a backward glance at her completed task. The sun had broken through the clouds and rested tenderly on the stooping figure of the old woman in her faded rags.

"What a picture!" I thought involuntarily; then aloud I said, "Will you come some time and let me paint you, Maggie?"

"Me!" she cried, startled.

"Yes, just as you are now, cleaning rags and all. Will you come?" I cried, my enthusiasm rising.

"Law! Why d'ye want to paint an old woman like me, Mister Carroll, with a face wrinkled like a monkey's? Why don't you paint a pretty girl? Old women are painted though sometimes, but only to make 'emselves look young agen. Ha, ha!"

It was useless to argue the point with her, so I only said:

"Yes, but I want you, Maggie. Will you come?"

"Law, if you really wanter 'ave me, I'll come, sir, 'cause you've been very good to old Maggie."

The sittings began the next day, and I derived much amusement from the old woman's conversation, while I painted away, with might and main, resolved that this picture should be hung at the Academy; and my imagination even went so far as to speculate on the most suitable style of frame.

At first it was only of the other lodgers that old Maggie gossiped, but one day, when she was looking very tired, I questioned her kindly about herself, and she finally told me her story.

The old woman had evidently taken a great fancy to me, and I wish I could remember the quaint words in which she told me of her girlhood in London, and her courtship by a man, poor like herself, though much above her in station—a newspaper writer, she said he was.

"When we was first married, we took a little country 'ouse that made me think of a biled dinner, for 'twas painted in red, an' green, an' deep yeller—jest like that paint yer mixin' up now—carrotty. Then the baby came."

Her whole voice and manner changed, and during the rest of the story she dropped the abrupt witticisms for a tremulous eagerness.

"Did ye know I 'ad a son, Mister Carroll?"

"No," I answered, intent on my work; "where is he now?"

"E's a rich man, an' a gentleman," she said proudly, and yet with a wistfulness that made me glance quickly at her face.

"If I could only get that expression," I thought; and went to work with perfect frenzy on the face.

"How is it that you are not a fine lady then, Maggie?" I asked.

"That's what 'e'd make me—*me*, d'ye 'ear?—who's scrubbed floors for thirty years! But I'd only shame 'im, an' folks 'd say, 'Dear, dear, an' d'ye know 'is mother is a charwoman!' An' then 'e'd only be ashamed o' me. No, no, no, I couldn't stand that, an' I tol' 'im so."

There was an awkward pause, in which I could think of nothing to say to the poor thing, so glanced at her compassionately, and thoughtfully mixed some sepia on my palette.

"Ye see, sir, 'twas this way," Maggie went on, after a while. "After Joe died we 'ad nothin'—not a penny to buy bread, so I sent the boy to the 'ome for poor children an' began scrubbin' floors. It was 'ard to let Dick go, but I tried not to sorrer over it, for I knew I couldn't keep 'im. I didn't see 'im for quite a while then, not till 'e was five year, for they wouldn't let visitors in on Sunday, an' I was workin' all the other days.

"I went up there with my scrubbin' things, an' 'e didn't know me, sir! 'E ran away an' 'id when I tried to kiss 'im. Well, after that, I went up whenever I could get away after my work was done at night, though I was awful tired, an' 'e got kinder uster me, an' liked to build tents by puttin' up my broom an' mops, an' wrappin' my shawl round 'em. 'E uster call my mop 'Doctor,' 'cause 'e said the end was like Doctor Dick's whiskers. Doctor Dick was the regular doctor at the 'ome, an' 'e'd took a fancy to my little Dick.

"One day, I was washin' windows in an office in Turner Street, an' in walks Doctor Dick. Well, we 'ad a talk, an' the end of it was 'e took my Dick to fetch up for 'is son. 'E was a nice, kind gentleman, an' I knew he thought a sight o' Dick, but it was 'ard for me, for I 'ad to promise not to see Dick after 'e left the 'ome. But I'd no money to fetch 'im up on, an' Doctor Dick 'd make a gentleman out of 'im, an' I couldn't stand in the boy's way; 'e'd soon forget me, though it nearly killed me when I thought of it.

"That must a-been near thirty year ago, but somethin' hurts 'ere," touching her heart, "when I think of the day I said good-bye."

There was another pause, in which I painted furiously.

"What day's to-day? The thirteenth, isn't it? Well, 'twas just five years ago that Dick found me out, an' I was still scrubbin'. I didn't seem to 'ave no 'art to get anything better to do after I let Dick go. What was the use?

"Doctor Dick was dead, an' 'ad left my Dick lots o' money an' a letter that told 'im about me; so 'e'd come to look me up an' take me to live with 'im. 'E was good, but awful cold an' still-like, an' wore kid gloves, an' finer close nor Joe ever 'ad. But I ought not 'er say that, for 'e allers is very good to me, jest as if I was a lady; but you see 'e was different, an' I never could love 'im like little Dick.

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"So I told 'im 'e must leave me where I was, for I couldn't be 'appy in a big 'ouse with fine close, an' would only shame 'im before folks—an old woman like me. I was too old to change. I'd scrubbed all my life, an' was goin' to scrub to the end. 'An',' said I, 'ye musn't come to see me on week-days when I'm workin' either, 'cause 'twouldn't do no good, an' folks 'd only wonder.'

"'E got a little angry at that, but I fancy he was glad at bottom. I said 'e could come on Sundays, an' we'd spend that day together if 'e wanted to.

"So now 'e comes every Sunday, an' takes me to church, an' I rig out in the fine shawl an' bunnit an' things 'e keeps givin' me, and try to be like a great rich lady.

"It's hard sometimes to think 'e's really my boy, for 'e don't talk like me or seem to belong to me somehow; but I s'pose it's all right, and 'e's a real fine gentleman is Dick," she finished, with pride, which poorly concealed the aching mother-heart beneath.

"Poor Maggie," I said softly, under my breath.

"Why do you say that?" she cried, almost fiercely, "I ain't sorry 'bout anything, an' Dick's as good to me as 'e can be. Mighty few women's got such a son!"

After that we neither spoke till the clock struck six, and I stepped back to view my work.

It was truly the best thing I had ever done, and another hour's work would have finished it, but the light was going fast, so I began to put away my paints and brushes, and Maggie gathered up her things to leave.

"I wish there was something I could do for you," said I, as I slipped a coin into the old woman's hard palm. I felt more sympathetic now that my work was done, and her story seemed more to me than when I was wondering whether to use grey or brown for her faded eyes.

Her face brightened at the words.

"Sometime," she faltered slowly, "if you could paint Dick—jest a little thing for me——"

"Gladly," I answered, "but when and where can I see him?"

"Why, 'e——" she stopped. "Sometime, p'haps, you'll see my Dick, an' I 'ope you'll like 'im. I should like to 'ave you know my son, Mister Carroll. Good-night, sir."

And she was gone.

I had just got back from dinner, when there was a knock at my door, and Doctor Davis came in unceremoniously. I was used to having him drop in about that time in the day, and rather enjoyed a chat with my gentlemanly landlord, for, though outwardly grave, almost to sadness, he displayed at times a grim humour that was vastly entertaining, and he was, moreover, a man of education and refined tastes. He rarely spoke of himself and kept his cloak of reserve well buttoned up to his chin—sometimes I even thought he turned the collar up to ward off all personal questions. But I knew him to be a physician with a limited practice, and a fine house in G——— Street, besides the row of lodging-houses from 115 to 121, West Lambert Street.

"How are you, Davis?" I said, without changing my position.

"As well as this beastly weather permits anyone to be," he replied, taking the only vacant chair. "The fog is so thick outside you could drill holes in it and blast it with gunpowder."

But his attention was attracted just then to my easel.

"What's this?" he cried, and moved the lamp to get a better view.

I had my back to him; so after a long silence, I wheeled around to say, rather impatiently I fear, as I did not understand his hesitation:

"Well, how do you like it?"

"It's truly fine, Carroll. I never dreamed you would do anything like this. Why, my dear fellow, your reputation will be made."

I felt very much gratified, for Davis was something of a critic and his opinion worth having, but it wouldn't be manly for me to show my pleasure, so I only said indifferently:

"You think it will go, then?"

"Go! Now, look here, Carroll, I want this. Name your own price, but I must have it."

"You've seen Maggie, of course, haven't you—the old woman who cleans the halls here?"

"Yes, often," he answered slowly.

"Do you think it is like her?"

"Very like—and yet older and sadder-looking someway. Don't you think so?"

"No. She looked just like that to-day. She's to pose again to-morrow, for, as you see, it's not quite done yet. This hand needs touching, and the dress should be worked up a little more."

"Yes; but I wouldn't touch it, if I were you. It's just perfect now, and you might do too much, you know."

"Nonsense," I said, rather vexed at his tone.

"I must go along now," he said, buttoning up his coat. "I've some business in the next house—119."

I noticed for the first time that he looked ill, and tried to make him take some brandy before he went out, but he seemed in a hurry and couldn't stop.

"Good-bye," he said, "and remember the picture is mine." It was a hot, clammy night, and after Davis left I threw the windows open as far as they were made to be thrown, and got as far out of one of them as I safely could, by tilting my chair back, and extending my legs out into that undefined everywhere called the wide, wide world.

So Davis had bought my picture and I was to name the price. Well, he was a rich man, I thought complacently, and my price grew in size the longer I thought about it. It did not occur to me that a receipted bill for three months rent, due last week, might be justly considered as a part payment. I would make the sum large enough to cover my expenses to Paris and back next summer; and then——

I was startled by hearing the door to the next room shut gently. I had not indulged in many dreams of my fair neighbour lately; in fact, my new interest in art had locked the door on my curiosity, and someway now I cared little about finding the key.

I nearly jumped out of my chair, however, when I heard a distinct groan from the next room; and, as I sprang to my feet, there was the sound of a heavy fall. I rushed into the hall. This was no time for knocking, and I swiftly turned the handle of the door which had so baffled me in my desire to know more of the occupant of the room behind it.

The room was totally dark.

"What's the matter? Can I be of any assistance?" I called, peering into the blackness.

The room was larger than mine, and handsomely furnished, evidently by a person of taste, I had time to think to myself before my eyes fell on a dark figure lying, face downwards, on the floor beside the table.

I quickly put the lamp down, lifted her gently on to the bed, and bent over her to see if she were conscious.

To my surprise it was old Maggie, and she was quite, quite dead!

I was so stunned that I could not think for a minute. Then I went out, closed the door softly and reverently, and ran downstairs.

So this was my neighbour, and I never knew!

On the second floor I met one of the housemaids carrying a lamp, which I took out of her hands.

"Go quickly," said I, "to 119, and tell Doctor Davis that Maggie is dead."

The girl looked frightened, but obeyed without a word.

Then I suddenly thought of her son—Dick, she called him. He must know. I was about to go in search of someone else, when I met Davis on the landing in the dimly-lighted hall.

"Davis," said I, "we must send for her son. Do you know where he lives?"

I could see even in the semi-darkness that his face was working convulsively, but, without answering, he strode on to Maggie's room, I following.

Two of the maids were in the room now, one of them weeping noisily, for Maggie had been kind to her last winter when she was ill.

But Davis did not notice them. He went quickly over to the bed, dropped on his knees by its side, and taking the poor, stiff, wrinkled hands in his, he covered them with kisses.

When he rose and turned toward me, I saw the great tears rolling down his face.

"Carroll," he said gently, "leave us together. Her son is here."

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THE SHATTERED IDOL.

NELLY'S father was firm on that point.

"No," he said deliberately, "she is yet too young to even listen to a suggestion of marriage, Gordon; and, high as you undoubtedly stand in my estimation, I assure you it would be exceedingly bad policy on my part if I were to give my consent to your immediate union. The girl is only eighteen, and at that age it is not to be expected that her judgment and discretion should be mature, more especially where the passions of the heart are concerned.

"I do not for one moment doubt the absolute sincerity of your affection; but, at the same time, you must remember that you are the only man she has ever loved, simply because you are the only man with whom she has had an opportunity of becoming at all intimate.

"It is well to allow her to have ample opportunities for making a fresh choice in other directions if she is so inclined. During the next couple of years I promise you she shall have a chance of doing this; and if, at the end of that time, her disposition towards you is the same as it is now, then you shall have her, my lad, with my blessing."

Stared hard across the water.

Gordon gently tapped the floor of the hotel verandah with his foot and stared hard across the water at the white roofs of St. Kilda, that fringed the shore of Port Phillip Bay. The elder man, a bronzed type of an Australian sheep farmer, lay back in an easy-chair, and regarded the suitor for his daughter's hand with an expression of commingled pity and affection.

He was fond of Gordon; he would have chosen him among a hundred others as a son-in-law; but he was a wise father, and his daughter's ultimate happiness was at stake and turned upon his words. His arguments, to himself, were reasonable and well-chosen, but to Gordon, madly in love as he was with Nelly, they seemed absurd and unnecessary. Still, he knew that there was not one grain of ill-feeling in the motives that actuated Mr. Anson's refusal, and when the first flush of bitterness that rose unbidden to his compressed lips had died away, he held out his hand and, swallowing his disappointment, said that he was content to abide by his future father-in-law's decision.

"I can't possibly stay in Melbourne, though," he said, huskily, "unless I make myself perfectly objectionable to any fellows you want to get Nelly to know. I don't want to have a bad name in the city, and I know that if I remain here Nelly won't find many opportunities of making fresh male acquaintances. So I shall go up country for a few months at a time, and come and see you and dear little Nell when I am in the city. In two years from now, then, I may have her, mayn't I?"

Mr. Anson nodded solemnly, and Gordon went away.

That evening he sat with Nelly on the verandah, and told her what had passed at the interview, and at what decision her father had arrived.

"How absurd," she said, petulantly tossing her head. "How very absurd of father. But I suppose it is useless to argue with him. I really fail to see that his course of action is at all necessary in my case, because," her voice fell to a soft whisper as she bent closer to him, "you know, you dear old boy, how much you are to me."

Gordon pressed her hand affectionately. An elopement and clandestine marriage suggested itself to his mind for a moment as he looked on the little girl by his side and thought of the two long years that would have to elapse before he might call her his own. But his sturdy Scotch nature drowned the thought, and with a big sigh he answered:

"I know, dear. And I also know that my little Nelly will come out of the ordeal which her father has mapped out for her absolutely immaculate, and with an augmented love for the man who, even now, has a right to call her his own."

A week afterwards he had gone up country.

. . . . . .

Less than a year later, Gordon lay panting in the gloom of the North of Queensland bush. For three days no moisture had touched his lips, now blackened and disfigured beyond all semblance of those which had once pressed kisses on the mouth of Nelly Anson. For three days he had struggled on, now under the fierce glare of the unmerciful Australian sun, now ill-sheltered by the shade of the tall gums.

A couple of months' tramping had led him into the camp of a gang of bushrangers, to whom he fell an easy prey. They were brutal, insulting fellows, the whole lot of them, with never so much as the common feelings of respect towards themselves or towards others with whom they came in contact. He had got a large amount of hard cash and notes about his person at the time, and they took care of it for him.

Not only that, they made known to him their intention of keeping him a captive until they found an opportunity of making more money out of him. They sent a note from him to the nearest white squatter demanding a goodly sum as a ransom, which, on his release, he would pay with interest; and, when the messenger came back with their money, they put it in their belts and moved on to the next station, repeating the operation.

He was perfectly helpless in their hands—they took good care of that. He had made several attempts to escape, but each one had proved futile. They kept him in good health, and already he had lost his ears and three fingers of the left hand by refusing to indite further supplications for ransoms, and he was further once tortured for attempting to smuggle a line begging for aid and revealing their true motives on a slip of paper wrapped up in the fraudulent message.

At the end of a few months, however, he became of no further use to them on account of the fact that the trick had been played on all the squatters within a reasonable radius with unqualified success, and his presence among them became a constant source of anxiety. Dead men tell no tales, and it would be all the better for their personal safety if he told none. A breach in their opinions, resulting from a few of the more sensible of the ruffians not wanting the blood of a fellow-creature wittingly on their hands, led to his being turned adrift

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in the bush, unarmed, unprovided with food, and, to their certain knowledge, with no water hole within a radius of twenty miles.

The knowledge that he was at length free aroused the deepest emotions of his heart, and, childlike, he ran and laughed at the very conviction of it.

Three days later he was a helpless, dying unit of humanity, lying beneath the shadow of a eucalyptus, and on the verge of insanity and of the grave.

The quivering vapour rises from the undergrowth where the burning rays of the sun pierce the mass of foliage above. The heat is stifling. The air is thick, like that of a large oven, and indrawn breath scorches the lungs. Everything is silent as the vault, not even the welcome rustle of a dead leaf or the chirp of a lazy insect can be heard.

Gordon is half lying, half sitting, with his back propped against the smooth trunk of the tree that rises fifty feet above his head. His head droops forward on his chest, and reason is slowly ebbing from his mind.

His arms are covered with lacerations from which he has drawn his life's blood to ameliorate the fearful pangs of thirst that have tormented him for so long. This constant draining of his life has rendered his hands and face a sickly yellow, and the repulsiveness of his countenance is enhanced by the tortures he has undergone.

But there is vitality in his frame yet, for, with an effort, he reaches for a sharp stone and inflicts a deep gash on the back of his hand which he presses to his swollen lips. His eyes gleam wildly as he sucks at the wound, and then he drops his hand.

With the other arm he feebly draws a tattered photograph from his belt, pressing it to his bloodstained lips, and kissing it as he had done a thousand times since he left her away back in the hotel at Melbourne.

In a bewildered manner, he wonders how long she will survive him if he never goes back; *if*, that is, for an unreasoning instinct tells him that, before the sun has set, help will come to him and he will be saved.

A strange emotion cheers him as he has never been cheered for months past, and he strains his blunted sense of hearing for some sound that shall bring the glad tidings of release from this misery.

When this assistance comes, he will recover, and then he will make his way joyfully back to his darling, and claim her as his own, after these years of agonising waiting. They will, after that, never part again; and her father will regret the time when he ordained that their union should be postponed.

Round the nucleus of his affection, which had been formed in Melbourne, has grown a powerful, undying, passionate love, augmented by an unwilling and involuntary absence.

He gazes wistfully at the picture for a short time, and then the overpowering heat, combined with the open wound in his hand, causes him to drop it, and he instinctively pushes it in his belt, as he rolls over in a faint.

When the parched lids slowly uncover his glassy eyes, he sees men about him and feels a cool moisture trickling down his throat. It is almost dark, and these good fellows who are tending him are on their way to a station not ten miles off. They lift him tenderly on one of their horses, and, as he proceeds, the cool night air, in combination with the frequent small draughts of water carefully administered, revive him so that he can talk to them at times reasonably.

He tells them about those three days of agony, and then wanders off, in an almost inaudible whisper, on to the subject of the little girl in Melbourne, who so patiently awaits his return, and he asks them if he may not go back to that city at once. They soothe him with vain promises, and then he comes back to his senses, and wants to know if they will let him head a party to hunt down the men in whose hands he has been helpless for so long.

When they come up to the station he is insensible with the exertion, and they place him in a comfortable bed and administer to his wants. One of them stays by the bedside all night. He is the owner of the station, a young man with a kind, honest face, and whose eyes are moist as he listens to the mutterings and meaningless talk of the sufferer.

At daybreak Gordon opens his eyes. His face is flushed and his head throbs and burns. The stranger is still at his side, and talks kindly to him, smoothing his forehead and moistening his lips with brandy and water. Then, when he is quieter, he sees the man go out of the room, and shortly after a girl comes in.

He does not see her until she is close by his side, and when he turns his pain-drawn face towards her he cries, in a weak voice:

"Nelly! My darling!"

She looks sorrowfully at him—she cannot understand. There is no resemblance between this pale, sickly looking man and anyone she has known sufficiently intimately to warrant their addressing her by her maiden name.

She takes his yellow hand in hers and smooths it softly, and as she does so he covers hers with his other fingers.

"I knew that I should see you again, Nelly," he whispers, a faint smile playing about his lips. "I knew that God would never ordain that—we—should—part for—ever." His breath comes in gasps now.

Still her contracted brows indicate her continued perplexity, as to who he is. Why should he call her Nelly?

"The two years are gone—dear; you—are my little—girl now."

She bends forward eagerly and looks into his face. Her cheeks are very white. Then she knows. But he does not, thank God. As she falls on her knees by the bedside and buries her face on the counterpane, he puts his hand on her brown curly head.

As she kneels there, with the hand of the dead clasped in her own.

"You are so—so glad to see me—back that you—cry?"

There is a glad ring in his weak, broken voice.

She nods her head almost imperceptibly.

"We will—get married as—as soon as I am able to get—up."

A heavy sob breaks from her in reply.

After a long pause he opens his eyes slowly.

"Nelly—darling little girl—do you—remember—that night—when we parted—you said that—you—would write me—by every mail. They took me—and I never got—your letters—dear—that is why—I did not write. I—was——"

The struggle to explain his seeming negligence of her faithfulness has sapped what little breath remained in his frame, and he closes his eyes in sheer exhaustion.

His lips move, and she reaches to hear the sounds that escape from them.

"Kiss me—darling—before—I go to sleep. I—am weary. To-morrow——"

She presses a passionate kiss on that poor contorted mouth, and then, as he falls into the long, deep sleep which knows no waking, she sinks on her knees and sobs as though her heart would burst.

And as she kneels there, with the hand of the dead clasped in her own, her husband comes into the room.

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MY FIANCÉE.

I HAD been telegraphic operator at "B Station" some six or eight months, and had held communication of a purely business character only with the operator at "D," when there came a change. Death silently removed the man who had been in charge there for so long, and a new operator was installed.

A message spun along the line one February morning in this wise: "Good morning, B."

I responded:

"Good morning, D."

Then came the information: "The old man died last night, and I have taken his place."

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Nellie Merton. What is yours?"

A spirit of devilry prompted my reply: "Ned Clayborn."

"Thank you," was the concise response. Then a message in real earnest came along the lines, and we were obliged to attend to business.

Every day I bade my unseen acquaintance, "Good morning," and never closed up at night without a farewell message. A twinge of conscience racked me at times, and a "still, small voice" whispered its warning; but the temptation was too great, and it was not long before I was sending sly messages, containing a good deal "atween the lines," to the unseen Nellie. The replies to these messages were guarded, but hopeful, and I grew bolder. It was no end of fun.

She told me her history. She had run away from home, because her parents insisted upon marrying her to a man she *detested* (and the last word came clicking viciously from my end of the line). She would never marry him—*never*. I advised her not to, and hinted at an affection deeper and truer than any the presuming "detested fellow" could offer.

Well, the outcome of it all was that I asked the unseen Nellie to be my wife, and even described the little home that was lonesomely awaiting her coming. I was floundering in deep water, and could but trust to a kind providence to pull me out. My "fun" was becoming dead earnest. How I wished the wires stretching between us were telephonic, instead of telegraphic, that I could perchance hear some exclamation, or gain some token of how my message was received. But this was not to be, and I had to possess my soul in patience.

That virtue was almost exhausted, when the well known call fell upon my ear. I flew to the instrument. It was concise, and not very complimentary: "Rather than marry that brute, I will risk it."

I was in for it now, and must perforce flounder still deeper by sending rapturous messages over the wires. I, Delia Brown, was engaged to be married to a young lady I had never seen. This was forcing the question of woman's rights.

I carried the "fun" on for over three months, and every day it grew decidedly less "funny," until I began to brood over the predicament into which I had giddily led my feet. The time was rapidly approaching when I would have to claim the bride I had won in this novel and romantic manner, and my blood ran cold at the thought of how easy it would be for her to learn of my perfidy, and from all I had seen of her temper, I felt sure she would not deal lightly with anyone who dared to play tricks upon her.

At last I could bear it no longer, and one day, just three weeks before I was to travel to "D" and claim my bride, I got into the train with altogether another motive. It was to "kiss and make up," after I had begged her with tears to forgive me, etc., etc.

I found a little house, with a little sign in blue and white swinging in the breeze, similar to the little house and the little sign at "B." It was occupied at the time by a young man reading a paper. I looked at him, without speaking, and he returned the compliment in kind.

"I wish to see Miss Nellie Merton," I said, and, as he did not speak, I went on to explain. "I am the operator at 'B,' and have an important message, which must be delivered to her at once. A moment's delay means——" I paused for a word, and he spoke for the first time.

"So you are the operator at 'B,' and desire to see Miss Merton? I am sorry to disappoint you; but you see Miss Merton is at home at the present time, while I take her place. The fact is, she is going to be married, and is preparing for the great event. She cannot be seen personally, but if you will entrust the message to me, I will deliver it immediately, if you will be kind enough to take my place while I run round to her house."

His coolness nearly distracted me.

"I *must* see her!" I exclaimed excitedly.

"But you cannot," he said coolly. "I have strict orders not to let anyone know her whereabouts for a day or two, until these preparations are well under way."

I was on the verge of tears, and, with a choke in my voice, I cried out, sinking into a chair, and holding up my hands deprecatingly:

"Don't say another word! You will set me wild. If you will not tell me where to find Nellie," I went on, in desperation, "will you please tell her this? I have been a bad, wicked girl, and—and—and—there is no such person as Ned Clayborn. It started in fun, and—and—and—please let me go to her. She will understand me so much better than you can explain it."

"No such person as Ned Clayborn! My dear young lady, I must beg leave to differ with you. That is the name of the young man who, in three short weeks, is to marry Miss Merton. Surely he is not dead?" he added in consternation.

"Oh, will you not understand? It was all a joke at first. I thought it would be great fun, and so I—well, I am Ned Clayborn, and after a time we became engaged—all in *fun*, too" (here I laughed hysterically); "I tried to stop, but I was so wicked I could not, and now poor Nellie will break her heart, and—and—and——" and I broke down and began to cry in a miserable way.

Unlike most men, my companion was not in the least disconcerted at the sight of my tears, but simply laughed, loud and long.

Presently the laughter ceased; then I heard uneasy movements in the chair occupied by my companion; then he got up and paced about restlessly. Pretty soon a light touch fell upon my arm, and his voice, very gentle and kind, said: "Nellie is here to receive your confession and forgiveness." I dried my eyes and looked up, but saw no one but the tall young man, who was looking at me very earnestly.

"Where is she?" I asked, ready to cry again.

"Here," he said, holding out his hand. Instinctively I put mine into it, and it closed over it firmly.

"I also have a confession to make," he said earnestly. "I thought you were another young fellow like myself, and, wishing to relieve the tedium of these long, monotonous days, struck up a flirtation. I intended some day to meet the young man and have it out with him, when you came with your strange confession. In short," he ended abruptly, "I am Nellie Merton. And you are Ned Clayborn? Come, dry your eyes, Ned; your Nellie is not heartbroken at the turn of affairs."

After staring at him in silent amazement for the space of five seconds, the truth of the whole matter began to dawn upon my confused brain. My face grew hot with indignation. I snatched my hand from his and sprang to my feet.

"You are a contemptible fellow!" I cried. He did not reply, but stood looking down at me from his superior height.

"It was a hundred times meaner in you, because your object was a *woman*. I will never forgive you, if I live to be a thousand."

"Isn't that rather paradoxical, considering the fact that you

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thought I was a woman, and *you* were enacting the rôle of the sterner sex?" he asked.

"You might have known," I answered severely.

"But I did not," he said.

"Here is my train," I said shortly.

"Good-bye," he replied, assisting me on to the train, despite my independence, and lifting his hat as it pulled out.

I travelled back to "B" a sadder but a wiser woman.

"You are a fool," said I to reflection in the little mirror as I removed my hat.

A year rolled by. I had entirely recovered from my chagrin, and buried in the darkest chamber of my memory was every thought of the tall young operator at "D Station."

One morning I was arranging and copying some night-messages, when a long shadow fell across my papers. A glance upward told me who it was. The door of that secret and darkened chamber of my memory flew open, and I knew that the tall young man at "D Station" was not as yet quite consigned to oblivion. Standing with hat in hand, and without any preface of any kind, he said:

"Over a year ago you asked me to marry you, and I consented. I have come to-day to ask, Will you come? Or shall I enter suit for breach of promise?"

What could I do? And, after all, perhaps he would not have made me a better husband had I met him in the old, conventional way, and waited for him to propose to *me*.

A SAILOR OF THE "SARACEN."

My life as a cabin boy on board of the *Saracen* was a hard one. The *Saracen* was a fine steam-packet of the early days, which carried the mail between Liverpool and New York. She took first and second cabin passengers, emigrants, and a general cargo. It was my first experience as a sailor, and I confess that it did not come up to my expectations. A sailor's life had figured in my imagination as one of the greatest independence.

I found it more like slavery than anything else. Every one seemed to take the greatest pleasure in abusing me and making my life miserable generally. I was kicked and ordered about from morning until night. Every menial service that could be thought of I was made to do. I was thoroughly disheartened and discouraged before many days, for there was not one person in the whole ship who gave me a kind word or look. My greatest tormentor was the second mate, a man named Douglas. He was a good sailor, but by nature he was a brute and a bully.

One of the crew was a man named Savage, who was a big, broad, powerful fellow, with an honest, upright face that attracted everybody who met him. Somehow he took a fancy to me, and, after that, nobody but the second mate ever abused me, and by dint of caution I managed to avoid him very successfully.

We had an ordinary, uneventful passage until we arrived off the Grand Banks, where we ran into a dense fog, and the weather became colder. The fog was so thick that it seemed as though we were sailing in the clouds, and the moisture dropped from aloft like rain. Every noise had an uncanny sound, and the whistle, which was blown frequently, as a warning of our approach, sounded as though it came from half-a-dozen different places at once.

A restless and oppressive feeling seemed to fill the air, and the passengers and crew paced silently up and down the decks, pausing every now and then, as if they had heard some strange sound. They seldom spoke to each other, and when they did it was always in whispers, and with cautious glances over their shoulders. Why we should have been so affected is more than I can explain.

I was standing on deck, and Savage was passing me, when he stopped and said, "I think there are bergs around. Don't you feel it getting colder?"

I had felt it, and was asking him questions about bergs, when the look-outs both cried, "*Starboard, sir! Ice ahead!*"

Before the ship could answer her helm, I saw an immense shape of white, towering high above us, and the next minute we crashed into a solid mass of ice, which looked like a mountain. The shock was terrific, and dislodged a huge fragment, which fell, crashing through our decks, and we heard the rush of the water, as the vessel began to fill and sink with incredible rapidity.

As soon as they could collect themselves, everyone rushed to the boats. Savage and I managed to crowd into the second cutter. She was soon lowered away, and we shoved off, and lay to a little distance from the ship. We were packed so tightly that it was next to impossible to even turn round, and the gunwales were barely awash. I found that Mr. Douglas had charge of the boat, and my heart sank with fear.

We saw two other boats get away before the *Saracen*, throwing her stern high into the air, and amidst a great rush of water, sank from our sight. One of the other boats was caught in the vortex and swamped, throwing the occupants into the water. The suction drew our boat in amongst them. Those who could grasped our gunwales, and endeavoured to climb aboard; but Mr. Douglas drove them back with blows from the tiller, and, cursing us for our clumsiness, bade us get out the oars.

The boat was so greatly crowded that this was difficult to accomplish, but after a good deal of trouble we managed to ship them, and had already taken a stroke when the gunwale was grasped by a woman holding a child in her arms. Mr. Douglas, with an oath, hit her with the tiller, but although she groaned from the pain she still hung on with a grip like death. He raised the tiller to hit her again, when Savage stood up from his oar, saying, "Hold on, sir; she can have my place," and without another word he slid overboard, and had shoved the woman in among us before we had recovered from our astonishment.

As he swam away I called to him to come back, but he only turned and waved his hand, and while we were gazing after him he disappeared in the fog.

The sea remained calm, and the next morning we were picked up by the bark *Mohasset*, and landed in Philadelphia.

Savage was never heard of again. He must have perished, but he died a hero, and, like many others who have performed the noblest deeds that man can do, he is utterly unknown.

In the next issue of *Short Stories* a thrilling serial story entitled "The Outlaws of the Air," by George Griffith, Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," and "The Syren of the Skies," will be commenced. Many novel features will be introduced, and the story will be profusely illustrated by E. S. Hope.

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A RACE FOR LIFE.

In some countries—even in many of the Southern States of America—convicted criminals are not kept confined in prisons, but are either employed on public works or "farmed out" to contractors, who employ them in digging canals, building railways, or other such enterprises requiring manual labour.

The system has certain advantages and many disadvantages. There is always a likelihood that the prisoners will escape in spite of the vigilance of guards who have constantly to watch them while at their work.

In conversation with a veteran engine-driver a few days since, on the various perils to which an engine-driver's life is exposed, he related a thrilling incident of his stay on the other side of the Atlantic a few years ago, which I will attempt to reproduce.

"The most dangerous run I ever made was down the Blue Ridge, where the railway crosses the mountain at a grade of 1 in 26. Throughout the long ascent up the Ridge it winds about the mountain sides in spiral curves, often quite sharp, and actually in one place passes the same point three times at different elevations as it works upwards.

"Near the top is the famous 'mud-cutting,' which has so puzzled all the railway engineers. Soft mud is being continually forced up by the pressure of the strata on each side, so that a 'ballast train' and gang of labourers are constantly required to keep the way clear. For this service the company has for some time employed State convicts.

"I was at this time in charge of the 'bank' engine, which assists the train to climb the heavy mountain grade, and on the eventful day I had pushed up the morning mineral train as usual, and gone into a siding to allow the early passenger train to pass on its way to Ashville.

"From this elevated situation a wide view is opened out down the mountains, and already the smoke from the passenger engine could be seen in the distance as it slowly ascended the spiral grades up the side of the main ridge.

"Meanwhile the ballast train, with its gang of men, was still on the main line, and the convicts were busily engaged in throwing the soft mud upon the waggons. The engine-driver had for some cause left his post for a few minutes, when one of the convicts, unobserved by the guards, stealthily withdrew the coupling pin behind the tender. The fireman was near the cylinders, oiling the bearings.

"Seizing his chance, the convict suddenly sprang upon the engine from the opposite side, and before either of the guards realised what was happening he had pulled the throttle valve wide open. In an instant the engine was moving off rapidly under full head of steam.

"The fireman's shout was the first intimation that anything was really wrong. The guards realised it when too late. Bang! bang! went the rifles all round, but the bullets were too tardy for the desperate rogue. He ducked nimbly down behind the tender, and the balls rattled harmlessly against the sides of the engine.

"Had they hit or killed the reckless fugitive the condition of affairs would hardly have been improved, for the locomotive was puffing away and rattling down the mountain side towards the approaching train. Evidently the convict intended to jump off when at a safe distance, and escape during the confusion of the wreck. The heavy ballast-engine would naturally crash into the other train like a cannon-ball.

"The officials and guards stood staring after the receding engine as though paralysed.

"What, indeed, could they do? Then the thought flashed to my mind. Could I give chase with my own engine and catch the runaway?

"It was the only chance to save the passenger train from the horrors of a collision, and, desperate as the chance looked, it must be taken instantly.

"'Open the points!' I shouted, as I threw the lever over.

"As my engine came up, one of the guards scrambled on beside me, and my stoker jumped on as we dashed past.

"In a moment we were out on the main line, and gathering headway under full pressure of steam.

"But the ballast-engine had the start, and was the heavier of the two engines, though mine had higher wheels. On this latter circumstance alone rested my chance of overtaking the ballast-engine, and it seemed a doubtful chance at best. It is a reckless business to give an engine full steam on a down grade. But all depended on the first few minutes, and I bade Henry, my fireman, shovel in coal with all his might.

"In half a minute we were going at thirty miles an hour, which rapidly increased to fifty, then sixty.

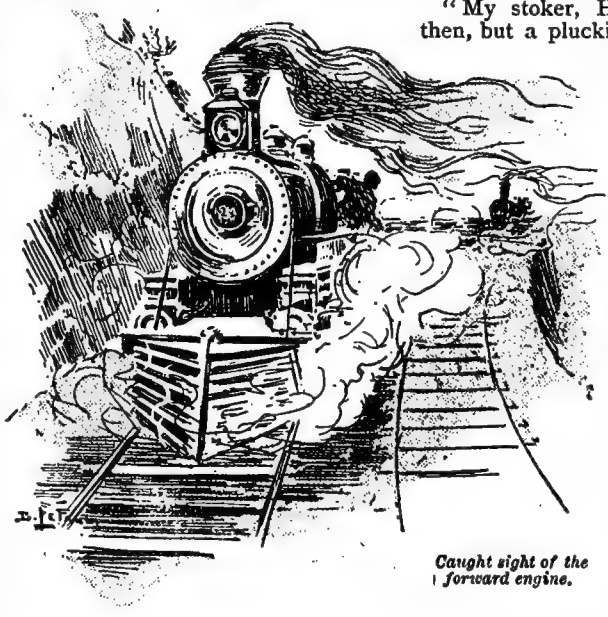
"The rocky crags and ledges beside the line flew behind us in streaks, and the trees below seemed blended into a confused patch of green as we were hurried towards them.

"Instinctively I closed the throttle-valve, for no engine could carry steam down such a grade and live. Ahead was a sharp curve. We swayed round it like lightning, and then caught sight of the forward engine, still a long way ahead. But we were gaining—I could see we were lessening the distance. Could we overtake it in time? The passenger train could hardly be more than three or four miles away.

"Catching sight of us bearing down upon him, I saw the convict run out of the tender and look about as if trying to see a smooth spot to jump upon; but the engine had acquired such a terrific speed that he was evidently afraid to leap.

"'Point your rifle at him and call him to stop!' I shouted to the guard; but the guard, terrified at the rate we were running, dropped his carbine on the coal heap, and was crouching and holding on with all his might, the most abject picture of fear I ever saw.

"My stoker, Henry, was a mere slip of a boy then, but a pluckier lad never opened a fire door. Bidding him hold the lever, I caught the rifle, and getting on the tender, pointed the weapon at the scoundrel on the ballast-engine, motioning to him at the same time to reverse the lever. Evidently misunderstanding my meaning, or frightened by the terrific speed, he jumped off the tender the moment he saw the rifle, and was instantly hurled headlong over the ledges—down the steep mountain side. I caught a glimpse of him, whirling head over heels, as we passed by.



Caught sight of the forward engine.

"He had left his engine running free, and I now knew that I must myself stop it, if it was to be stopped at all.

"We were gaining upon it but slowly, and I scarcely dared to give my engine more steam. I could not tell how far down the passenger train was. If our high wheels would but keep the track!

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"The engine careered from side to side as we darted round the sharp curves. Every moment I expected to feel it plunge into the gorge below, and there was no hope that the low-wheeled ballast-engine would leave the rails. I must catch it, or the passengers would be lost. Several times I opened my whistle, hoping the passenger-engine driver might possibly hear me. The trouble was that owing to the curves the latter could not see us at all, and the rattle and roar of his own train would most probably prevent his hearing.

"'Give it her, Henry!' I shouted, for I knew now that what we did must be done inside another minute and a half; and in my desperation I determined that if there must be a collision, it should be in an effort to overtake the runaway. The locomotive now scarcely touched the rails as she bounded forward under the fresh pressure of steam.

"We were now within thirty yards of the ballast, and we could catch up to it in half a minute more if my engine could keep the rails.

"At this point a rocky cliff rose on one side of the line, and on the other the steep mountain dropped abruptly into a gorge hundreds of feet below.

"Looking down across the ravine, we seemed to be literally flying in mid-air.

"Meanwhile I had run forward ready to leap upon the ballast-engine the instant we came close enough. Then for an instant the runaway disappeared, as both engines plunged into a cloud bank that lay piled against the mountain side.

The body of the convict was found on the rocks.

"For a moment or two nothing was visible. But for the roar of the wheels as they spun along the narrow shelf I should have thought we had jumped from the hill and were plunging down into the valley.

"When, a second later, we emerged from the fog, the tender of the ballast-engine was only a few feet before me. I dared wait no longer. Even now I fancied that I could hear the roar of the passenger train from below. Measuring the distance well with my eye, I stepped back, and straining every muscle for the dangerous leap sprang across the intervening space, caught upon the rear of the tender, hung for a moment, then, with might and main struggled to get aboard it—a feat that could not have been accomplished had not the engines had the same relative speed and motion.

"Truly that was a spring for life! Not for my own life merely, but for many others on the coming train.

"Had the distance been a foot more I should have missed, and been instantly ground to pieces.

"It required but an instant now to scramble hurriedly over the coal, thrust back the lever, reverse, and open the sand boxes.

"Henry had at once done the same for our own engine.

"We had scarcely brought the two to a standstill when, puffing heavily round the next curve below, we saw the engine coming unconsciously on to a certain destruction had we not caught the runaway just as we did.

"It was an easy matter for the up-coming train to stop, and in half a minute more all three engines were moving quietly up hill. Very little was said, and to this day I suppose the passengers do not know why that abrupt halt was made on the mountain side, or how fearfully near they all were to death that forenoon.

"The body of the convict was found on the rocks, several hundred feet below, so mutilated that, but for the striped clothes, no one could have identified it."

THE MINER'S LOVE.

ROWDY! It was no word for it—too genteel by half. We were as wicked a set at our diggings as New South Wales could show—no slight thing. If the world's kettle had been set on the boil we'd have come to the top as prime scum—truth, mate.

But among us was a man dubbed "the squire," because, although he lived and dressed just as we did, there was that in him which stamped him as of a different breed. I never came upon his double before or since, and swells out of luck are plenty in Australia. Rumour went that he was an English baronet, but had been forced to cut and run; so he tried New South Wales and the gold diggings, bent on succeeding.

He did not live alone; his daughter was with him, though how and when she reached him no one knew. They lived in a small shanty in the midst of pines, far apart from the other huts, a queer frame for such a grand picture of a woman—a lady with a superior bearing visible in her father.

I'd walked that way with the squire once, and she ran out to meet him. The sight of her struck me all of a heap, so unexpected in a lonely spot where there was no other company than the birds, no sound but the wind in the trees. She was tall; the colour of wild roses in her cheek; heaven's blue in her eyes. Her dress was dark, and had none of the flashy ornaments that women such as we take up with cram on; her hair, coiled smooth about her head, shone like black satin.

"This is one of my—chums, my dear," said "the squire," with his soft voice and his hard smile.

Since then I had often hung about the log-house after work. I fetched water and sticks, and did such odd jobs as were not fit for her, saying no word; but she found me out in a brace of shakes, and was thankful for such help as I could give, knowing that I meant no harm, though I startled her at first—a great giant of a chap in my rough gear.

Once I came across her watching in the gloaming. How eerie it was under the trees: the wind soughed through the branches, bringing a dash of rain; a deluge was in the black clouds sweeping across the sky.

"I am anxious about my father," she said, and she looked like a tall white lily that had been shoved into the wrong spot, and touching my big, earth-stained fingers with her fine, slim hand, "I am always anxious about him, though, since knowing you I have not felt so absolutely distressed, for I am glad to recollect that you are within his call. You will stand between him and harm, I think."

"Why, yes, miss; make your mind easy on that score; 'twould be done with a will. But what harm is like to come that you need worry yourself?"

"Ned," she cried, stopping suddenly—her father always called me so—"I had such a curious dream last night. I dreamed that I went down into the valley beyond the wood,

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and there I saw my father lying upon the grass sound asleep —so sound that I could not wake him, while the clusters of wild flowers sprang up so high that they hid him, and I heard the pines in the distance chanting a solemn kind of litany. I was crying when I awoke."

"You are too much alone, miss, and grow nervous."

"My father has been very fortunate lately, has he not?" she asked.

"He has had some good finds, miss; and to-day he got hold of two jolly big nuggets."

"I am glad. Will he bring them home this evening? What's that?"

She sprang to the door, flinging it open, the shine of the lamp behind her.

"Dearest father," she cried, "is it you?"

But she broke off, alarm in her voice. "Ned! Ned!" for no father was there, but two of the worst of our lot—scamps for whom hemp was growing; the one a blackguard sailor, the other a smartish, slim chap, thin, dark, lying. His name was Phil Dawlish.

I remembered now, as I saw him by the flash of the light, that he, as well as I, had been near when "the squire" held up the two great nuggets; and it struck me—I'm quick at conclusions—that both scoundrels had not intended to come up to the house, but were just lurking about. What for?

Miss Helen—I only knew her by her Christian name—faced them steadily, though she had called me to her, and asked what they wanted.

"Why, nothin' in special, miss," stammered Dawlish, lifting his ragged straw hat with swell-mob politeness, and a leer that made me tingle to kick him; "only, is the old boss at home? I—I mean your pa, miss," he translated.

"No," she replied, nodding her head high, to show that she was not frightened, but I, being close to her, could hear her heart thudding like a hammer, while the blood flamed to her brows, under the foul gaze roving over her. "Why do you ask?"

"Just this, mum. Will you be so good as to tell him that me and my pal's off to Hulton's Ranch for a short spell, and if he'd like to tramp over—why, 'tis a mighty 'andsome part of the country, and he'd be welcome, that's all."

She shut the door upon them, drawing a stout bar across it.

"Are those the men he works with?" she cried, flinging up her hands. "Heaven help us!"

I was casting about for another job when she stopped me by asking if I would go and meet her father.

"But you——."

"Nay, I do not mind. The little house is secure. Why," with a wistful smile, "I am always alone from daybreak until dark."

I knew it was the fact; so, bidding her open to none until she heard me or "the squire," I started on my errand.

Not very far had I to go, for I met him in that same little ravine of which his daughter had dreamed; it skirted the pine woods. His pick was over his shoulder, his right hand in his pocket—feeling the nuggets, perhaps. He was singing a song in some foreign lingo, Italian or Spanish. He looked more content than I had seen him—more at rest, nodding to me in his patronising fashion.

After a few stray words, I related what had happened, advising him to be on his guard.

"Thanks, I will," he replied haughtily, much amused at the scamps asking him to pay a visit in their company. "But I've a secret to tell you, Ned," he added. "I have done with Green Valley Creek and shaken off its crew. Luck has favoured me beyond my hopes. I can afford to turn my back upon it. I shall take my daughter to Melbourne. I have thought of settling there."

As he spoke the little tie of comradeship between us was shattered; in a moment we were sundered as the poles, so quietly he brushed it away.

No rest was mine that night; evil was in the air. So, as I could not sleep, I got up and went out. Not being a fool, I knew I must keep my misery to myself; but my life was empty!—empty! You see, I was hard hit, mate, like the donkeys. What was Miss Helen to me—could she ever have been to me—a lumbering, vagabond chap, not worthy to kiss the dust she trod on?

But I must go back and watch the house that covered her for this last night, so I returned to the ravine. In it were many little dells swarming with the wild flowers of the grand Australian spring. Now, in one of these same dells what do you think I saw? A dead man's face. Yes, I knew at once that he was dead, but so easily "the squire" rested on the wet moss that the song I had heard him singing might still be on his lips. His pockets, turned lining outward, were empty. Snatching up his pick, I tore on to the log-house, knowing well whom I should find there. My long sharp knife was in my belt. I raced round to the back; the little kitchen door was undone; the friends were in the squire's bed-room, making free with some whiskey which he had kept in a cupboard. Where was Miss Helen?

I found her in the sitting room, tied in her chair, her lips bleeding over her white teeth. The cursed hounds had struck her.

"There are three of them," she whispered, "those two who came and another man. They watched for my father and murdered him—they told me so. Hark! they are coming. Ned, they have pistols, and will shoot you where you stand. Go away this instant—only—kill me first;" and then she lifted her white pillar of a throat.

"Now, my beauty," roared a drunken voice through the thin partition, "we're bringing you a sup o' whiskey to drink our 'ealths in. Ain't you longin' for us to make love to ye? We'll stow away the rhino first, and then—you shall have your turn."

"Be quiet," I whispered back to her, hacking at the cords with my knife, and in a few seconds I had her out of the chair, and we dashed out of the house together.

On and on and on until the last tree was at our backs. Then we made for a lane which led to Johnson's tavern, leaving the yells faint in the distance. There we stopped, and there she told her tale.

News spreads quickly at the diggings, and Judge Lynch is for immediate action. Before noon the stolen gold—including the two big nuggets—had been recovered, and a couple of figures dangled from an oak by the wayside.

As soon as it was possible Miss Helen started for Melbourne, whence she was to sail for England, where she would join her mother's relatives—very heavy swells indeed, I believe. And I followed her in secret every inch of the way, though she knew it not until I stood by her on the deck of the steamer, after I had helped to stow her boxes safely in the hold. Then I blurted out that I hoped she would not be offended at my coming, but——and then I shut up.

"Ned," she cried; "brave Ned! dear, kind, good Ned! There are debts which can never be repaid, and I am your debtor always—always, Ned!" and holding out her hands to me she bowed her head upon my big brown fists and sobbed.

"You are welcome, Miss Helen," I spoke with a quiet voice. "I wish—I could have been a gentleman for just a little while, so that I might have served you better."

"A gentleman!" she cried, lifting her face and looking full at me, and then she raised these hard fists of mine to her soft lips and kissed them. Yes, she kissed them—and I!—how was I to help it!—the touch of those lips broke me down smash. Yet she was not angry—not offended. She put out her little hands to me again, meaning—I knew it—both to silence and comfort me. She did not speak—for what could she have said—what could any stately lady such as she have said? Besides, the steamer's engines were puffing, and time was up. She laid her head down on my arm a moment, and then left me with a rain of pitying tears.

When the vessel had passed completely out of sight, and its long smoke line had died out from the sky, I hurried back to Green Valley Greek, and took up my work again. Hard work is the best friend life has for us, sometimes.

But I have never forgotten Miss Helen—I never shall forget her; and I have trudged to the old spot often and stood before the empty house.

That's my story, old chap; we've each our own, of one sort or another.

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THE MAN MY SISTER MARRIED.

CHAPTER XX.

KATHERINE was buried at San Antonio, for she had expressed to me once her horror at being carried by rail elsewhere after death. I wrote to grandfather after her death and begged him to let me stay at the Mission longer, unless they needed me at home. He had sent me word that all were well, and wrote long letters, full of kindly criticism.

From Aunt Marg I seldom heard. She never liked writing, and fancied, dear heart, her education had not been thorough enough to express herself well. I speak of this because it explains why I did not suspect the truth.

The little house had grown pleasant to me. I had no horror of its loneliness, nor even of the room where Katherine died. As for the Mission, not one of those priestly men loved it more than I. If I thought of John at all during those days, it was with a feeling of repulsion. I would not have summoned him for the world.

One day, when Katherine had been dead a month, I went up to the roof of the Mission, where I used to hold ghostly communication with my spirit-priest, or thought I did. There was a tiny door at the foot of the tower, then a spiral staircase made of tree-trunks, that will last another hundred years, yet was worn lightly by the passing of those vanished feet; and one could dream of the men who mounted the stair, of the times so troublous, of the days so monotonous, until it was easy to feel that spirits were in the air and all about one.

A little round window led out on the ruined roof of the chapel, and here, on a low wall edging the roof, I used to sit. Above me the belfry tower, the mossy bell, with no duty now of calling to prayers or vespers, to herald the dawning day, or to sound the solemn midnight hour. Over the crumbling walls grasses and flowers grew, and tiny green lizards crawled in the sun; far round me were green fields and forests, the blue and silvery gleam of a river, and the lazy curling smoke in the soft summer air from homes in the cultivated lands.

I saw a stranger come cantering along the road.

A little village of houses had grown up round the Mission, and at the doors were idle Mexican crones, merry children, men smoking and gossiping, and Justina visiting among them, the worst gossip of the lot. In the shadow of the Mission, before the door, watched by those sculptured saints on the façade, some of the Mexicans have buried their dead. I thought it a pathetic and pretty idea, and one old woman has an altar in a room in the Mission, and goes there to pray.

As I sat there on my house-top, I saw a stranger come cantering along the road from town, then disappear in the shadow of the Mission. I had been waiting for a messenger every day, hoping he would come, and each horseman that passed our way set my heart beating wildly, until I saw that he was not the one expected. I heard Justina call, "Chica, are you up there?" and then she must have seen me, for, before I answered, I heard the click of the turret door.

Someone came slowly up the stairs, out of the window to the roof, a tall, slight young man, whom I did not recognise for a moment—James Gregory. I met him with outstretched hand. I had forgiven him that past long ago.

"I've been back to Galveston on business for John," he said awkwardly. "I've always been sorry about that—our past, Letty. Will you forgive me?"

"From my heart," I answered. He sat down by me on the wall.

"I was such a cad once, Letty; I hate myself when I think of it. John is such a fine fellow, so good to mother and to me, and my brother Dean is a scoundrel. I found it out too late."

He went on then to tell me how well he was doing, and, with some shyness, showed me the photograph of the pretty girl he was to marry. He said the home folks were well, and that my grandfather had treated him very civilly. He seemed to dislike being questioned about them, so we talked of other things, and I pointed out the home where Katherine died.

"How could you bear it? There can't be any of the old Letty left in you, living here a year, in the shadow of this old ruin. I feel like taking my hat off to a saint. Don't frown, but you are so different, so pale and sad looking, as though you'd frozen into a calm. You used to be such a lively girl."

"I am still so weary, I don't feel merry, but some day I mean to be as I used to. It's no comfort to people who love you to be always sad."

When he started to go, he stopped by the window, and said nervously, "Haven't you some message for John, Letty? He does not know I came here. It was my idea to see you, and start square in life when I marry. But I tell you few girls are ever loved as he loves you."

I gave him the bunch of violets at my breast.

"Tell him to wait," I said; "only to wait."

I watched him ride away, without regret for the world beyond; I seemed somehow to have lost all interest in life. Two days later, grandfather came, and he saw the change in me the first thing.

"This old place has shadowed you," he said remorsefully; "you're not like a girl ought to be, light-hearted and merry. I don't think shut-in lives as you crack up those priests to hold is ever so wholesome for humanity as outside. It takes more Christianity to travel over the cobble-stones of the life you're born to, and helping your folks; though, of course, as you say, they were noble ones that came here and laboured with Indians."

I took him over all my familiar walks, to the pretty places in the neighbourhood, and all over the Mission, into each mouldy cell, and to the roof. Up there he sat down panting. "Heaven does seem nigher up here," he said; "you wouldn't wish a good soul back from there, would you?"

In that warm summer day, I felt a sudden chill. Something had happened. I noticed grandfather had not looked so neat as formerly, pathetic evidences of want of care were evidenced in his linen, and the buttons of his coat were loose.

"Is Aunt Marg ill?" I asked, trembling. "She used to be so careful of you. You are not the same, and every time I ask you of her you put me off. In my selfishness, I have forgotten her. I stayed here to grieve over my silly self, when I might have been making her happy."

He drew me down to the wall beside him, then holding my hand tight, he said solemnly: "She is happy beyond our making or marring. She died two months ago. Cry on, pretty dear, it will ease your poor little heart. You must not blame me," as I broke into passionate reproaches, "it was her command that you should not be told. She went so suddenly there was no time to send for you; 'heart trouble,'

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the doctor said, and it was, but not as he thought—a whole life of heart-ache.

"She said her work was done when the baby she had saved had grown to a noble womanhood. She was so glad you were caring for Katherine, and doing the best you could to make her repent. She said your sacrifice would be repaid in a happy future. That past, with all its misery, was ended. John could love and be as other men.

"The case was over, Letty. The criminals sentenced and executed, the jury dismissed, and the only witness gone to her last home. Think what she bore, shut out from woman's happiness, a husband's affection, little children to love her, all her life. She, who was so gentle and kind, to be an instrument of death and vengeance.

"Cry on, dear. It's better than those dry, wide eyes, that white, set face. How thin you've grown. Your hand lies like a snow-flake in my brown palm. She wrote you a letter. I'm to give it you a year after her death. She said you must not wish her back; she was so glad to go. I miss her most, Letty—a part of my home, the best and noblest woman, the most unfortunate as ever blessed a man's home, and gave him hope of a hereafter."

Back to my old home on the beach, where the whispering waves seemed at night like the rustle of the trees about my Mission—and, oddly, that word has two meanings now. It was a mission to care for Katherine. I made myself cheerful and gay. I would not let the past trouble me, and someone was needed to make light in the quiet house, to cheer poor lonely Liz, and grandfather, patient and uncomplaining, but grown so old and sad.

I tried to fill her place; my Aunt Margaret's. If I failed, my very efforts cheered them and made my own days brighter. There were little neighbourly kindnesses to do, and so much work for the poor that I realised what a life of ministering and hidden charity hers had been. In her good deeds she lived in many hearts, and all that I could find of her charities, reading by sick beds, helping weary mothers clothe their little ones, I did; and I think her blessing followed me, for people grew to like me—those proud, shy folk, who are so quick to take offence at the best-meant efforts to help.

Justina and I took many walks, but never near the big house, and Bruce, who brought me flowers often, said the folks were all up North.

One night at supper, grandfather complained of my gown. Why didn't I wear white, like I used to, and pretty ribbons. It was no compliment to him, wearing sombre clothes. He

"This place ain't a dispensary, nor a hospital."

I looked up, and there stood John Scott.

supposed I thought he was in his second childhood, too old to notice anyone.

"Don't ye scold the child," put in Liz, bringing in the cakes.

"You talk too much," growled grandfather, and the good soul, who hardly ever speaks now, departed to the kitchen in high dudgeon.

To please him, I went up and put on my best white gown, a soft creamy woollen, with white ribbons, one my Aunt Margaret made for me years ago; and I thought then how much of the beauty and luxury of my life had been due to her.

"That's more promisin'," said grandfather, when I came down in the porch in my finery, and he went and picked me a bunch of his best roses. "I always have roses here, when there isn't one in Galveston," he chuckled.

Just then a shabby, wan-eyed woman came up the walk. Mrs. Smith, one of my pensioners.

"Now look here," said grandfather crossly, "this place isn't a dispensary, nor a hospital, and Miss Vi'let hasn't the time to waste on you; takes half her day now sewing for your family. What did you have so many for, when you knew you might be a widder, and have to go out by the day?"

"Don't mind him," I laughed; "you know he likes to talk."

"Don't I know him?" she said gratefully. "He's got my Danny to the Market, doing so well, and gives us fish often. La, Cap'n Lombard is knowed all over town; but, Miss Vi'let, it's only about a sleeve, the bastin' come out, an' I couldn't fix it, an' my Nell's set her heart on goin' to school. After washin' all day, my hands gits so stiff an' clumsy, I can't do much. Ma says you're one of God's angels, an' how comfortin' them books you read her is, to her that's bin bed-rid fifteen year. Think of her livin' an' Miss Collier gone! Oh, deerie me, it's a queer world!"

I took the little garment into the sitting-room and sat down by the lamp to mend the sleeve. Grandfather, smoking his pipe, looked in at the door.

"An all-night job, isn't it?" he growled.

"Only a few moments. Go to your garden," I said. Mrs. Smith, her shawl dropping off, her bonnet pushed back over her untidy grey hair, watched me with intense interest; she was so eager to learn, and so grateful for the little things I did for her.

"Grandfather, go away," I said crossly, as steps sounded in the porch; setting a sleeve is such bothersome work.

"La, Miss Letty, it's a strange gentleman," cried Mrs.

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Smith. I looked up and there stood John. I put my hand across my eyes. Was I dreaming? Had he come at last, and must we meet in this queer way? "I—I am glad to see you," I stammered, giving him the hand with the thimble on it; "this is Mrs. Smith."

"I never knowed there was company expected," cried Mrs. Smith. "I kin finish, Miss Letty, it's easy now; the child was so set on it, or I'd never come in this world a worriting ye."

"I have only a few stitches," I said unsteadily. "Please do not go." I felt like clinging to her and begging her to stay. I could almost hear the beating of my heart. He sat down near her, and began to talk to her, remembering her husband, who had been a fisherman, asking her kindly questions, and saying he must get something better for her to do than going out by the day. She, on her part, grew reminiscent, then told him about me with so much praise that my face grew scarlet.

"It's done, Mrs. Smith," I interrupted; "you must not talk about me like that; only half is true. You see I've turned seamstress, Mr. Scott, instead of singer."

"She do sing butuful to mother, though," cried Mrs. Smith, folding the dress, "an' to the Sailor's Bethel, last Sunday, it were like an angel. Mebbe it ain't my business, but I think she's too pale an' sorrowful like, sir, an' a cheering up now an' then would do her good. Livin' 'mongst old folk is wearin'. I don't like to be advising my betters, but mother an' me hes talked it over many a time."

"Mrs. Smith," called grandfather, "here's a basket of things for you; its middlin' heavy. I'll see ye to the gate."

With many blessings she departed, in her worried way, much upset by having intruded. I put my needle and thimble away.

"What an old-maidish Letty," said John, and there was the old merry ring in his voice, "doing good to the widow and orphan; to all but one."

"It's a selfish charity to please children and mothers," I answered; "a little kindness goes a long way. Where can grandfather be?" I finished nervously.

John opened the window and looked out. "He is smoking his pipe at the gate. The widow and her burden are disappearing homeward. How soft the sea is to-night; like far-away music. I am going to live now on my Robinson-Crusoe-like island. I never had any home since I was a boy."

"Your mother will be so happy," I faltered.

"I hope my wife will," he said gently, and I began then to talk of Aunt Margaret's death, and he said he was with her when she died. As he talked, I looked at him shyly. He had grown quite grey, his face thinner, his eyes sad; but now, as he smiled, his face grew bright and young. Then he was silent, both of us thinking of that dear presence—the woman who had given us two such a high and holy love. Then I spoke of Jim's visit, and how changed he was.

"He will make a fairly good man," said John; "Aunt Ann is very happy with him, and quite fond of the bride to be. He gave me your message and some withered violets. Neither dismayed me. I waited. Violet, are your eyes weak that you keep them down? You have not looked at me once."

"I—I did not know that," I stammered; "I was a little upset, the surprise and all." I sat down in a dark corner, where he could not see my blushing face; but he came to me, knelt down, and took me in his arms.

"I have waited, Letty, and now I find you a sensible girl, as you used to be, not a suffering, morbid Letty, weary of the world. I have been at the house two whole weeks watching you. I have smoked a cigar nightly in the garden, under your window, and watched your light go out behind the white curtain.

"Sometimes I've seen you leaning out, watching the stars and thinking, and I have been so jealous of your thoughts. I have been patient. Ah, God, so patient! Give me the real Violet now. Here are the dead ones you sent. I have kept them until now." He flung the withered things across the room. "Come," he said, rising and lifting me to my feet.

"Where?" I cried.

"You did not see my fellow conspirator come down the stairs in that memorable blue coat, or know Liz and our family witch, Justina, have gone this ten minutes to town, or that the carriage is out there. My dear old mother has been tormenting the parson this hour, trying to explain that other wedding ceremony. I took her to the church on my way here."

I pushed him away. "I can't understand," I hesitated.

He took a tiny package from his breast pocket and held it out in his hand; my wedding ring.

"But this old gown," I stammered.

"It's the one you wore when you came to confess to me, years ago. I know that little bow on the left shoulder. Let's be odd and wear our old clothes. If you have not a wedding garment, you shall not be cast into outer darkness, dear."

"I almost fear to be happy again," I whispered.

"Dearest, no more of that dreadful past; forget all, even that grey morning when you went away. Be my little love again. Let me live as other men live, and you as other wives. Have we not suffered enough?"

"John," I cried, clinging to him, "the old Letty has come back. She will be trying and cross, not always good, perhaps, but she loves you so. I was not the dead, calm woman I thought. I only shut my soul in the prison-house for a time."

At the church, John helped me from the carriage and lightly kissed my hair. His mother ran out to welcome me, very tremulous and happy, and grandfather's beaming face seemed almost young again. Justina caught my hand.

"You won't forget poor old Justina," she sobbed.

"John," I said, "I must always love and care for her; she has been so good to me."

"Always, Chica," she smiled, and Justina had to say a dozen prayers to her patron saint at once. The church was dim and dark, only a flickering gas-jet; but I was glad of that, for, honestly, I should have liked a prettier wedding gown. How nervous the minister was, because he remembered that other marriage, I suppose; but I was quite calm.

"No one shall part us now, my wife," said John, when he kissed me, and I had no fear. With such solemnity he thanked my grandfather for saving him that day, when he said "Good night," that I realised how strong was the temptation and how nobly it had been overcome.

The old mansion was all alight, and the servants waited at the door to greet me. "Your home, my daughter," whispered Mrs. Scott, "and oh, how glad, how grateful I am to God its mistress has come at last—my son John's true wife!"

"Come into the rose garden," said John, "it is yours now, while we live. You have come into your own at last."

The End.

No more tangled paths or dark, dark ways. I wandered with him in the paradise of those who love and are loved. The flowers nodded an odorous welcome, the fountain tinkled a merry song, far off the sea chimed with the laughter of the rustling trees, overhead the stars twinkled and beamed upon my happiness. All the past faded away. I knew only the golden present. To few on earth are given such joy and love, such tender care and happiness as were given me when I entered that enchanted land, where I shall live till death calls one of us; and even then I know I shall not be waiting long. Not even the grave can separate my love and me!

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A PAIR OF OLD SLIPPERS.

(FROM THE PERSIAN.)

THERE was at Bagdad a merchant, very notorious for his avarice, and his name was Abou-Cassem-Tambouri. Although he was enormously rich, his clothes were constantly in rags and tatters; his turban, made of coarse stuff, was so dirty that its colour could no longer be distinguished. Of all his garments, however, his slippers were the most remarkable; the soles were kept together by large clumsy nails, and the upper leathers were pieced in every direction. The famous ship *Argo* was not made up of a greater number of separate fragments.

During the ten years of their existence as slippers, the cleverest cobblers of Bagdad had exerted their utmost skill to tag together their remains, and had only succeeded by adding piece on piece, by which means they had become so heavy that they had passed into a proverb; and when anyone wished to describe something weighty, the slippers of Cassem were always the object of comparison.

One day, when the merchant was taking a walk in the great bazaar of the city, a proposal was made to him to buy a considerable quantity of glass bottles; he agreed to the offer, because it was an advantageous one; and having heard, a few days afterward, that a perfumer who had fallen into difficulties had nothing left but some rose-water, which he would, of course, be obliged to sell as speedily as possible, Cassem took advantage of the poor man's misfortune, and purchased it at less than half its value, and filled his bottles with it.

This successful stroke of business had put him into good humour, and, instead of giving a great feast, according to the custom of Eastern merchants when they have made an excellent bargain, he thought it better to take a bath, a luxury which he had not enjoyed for a long time.

While he was taking off his clothes, one of his friends, or at least one who pretended to be a friend—for it is a rare thing for a miser to have one—remarked to him that his slippers made him the laughing-stock of the whole city, and that he certainly ought to purchase a new pair.

"I have long thought of doing so," replied Cassem; "but my old ones are not so bad, and will last me for some time yet." While talking, he stripped off his clothes and entered the bath.

At this juncture the Cadi of Bagdad came also to take one. Cassem, having finished his bath before the judge, went into the first apartment, where he found his clothes, but not his slippers, which had disappeared, and in their place was a new pair, which our miser was convinced were a present from the man who had made him such a friendly remonstrance about them.

With that he made no more ado, but put the new pair on his own feet, thus sparing himself the pain of buying new ones, and left the bath overjoyed with his prize.

When the Cadi had finished his bath, his slaves looked about in vain for their master's slippers, and finding only a wretched pair, which were immediately recognised as Cassem's, the police ran after the supposed sharper, and brought him back with the stolen goods upon his feet. The Cadi, after having exchanged the slippers, sent Cassem to prison; and, as he was well known to be rich as well as avaricious, he was not allowed to come out of prison until he had paid a handsome fine.

On returning home, the afflicted Cassem threw his slippers in a rage into the Tigris, which flowed beneath his windows. A few days, after, some fishermen, drawing up a net heavier than usual, found in it Cassem's slippers. The nails with which they had been patched had broken the meshes of the net.

The fishermen, to spite Cassem and his slippers, threw them into his room by the open window, and in their passage they struck the bottles containing the rose-water, and, knocking them down, the bottles were broken, and the water totally lost.

The grief and wrath of Cassem on seeing this may easily be conceived. He cursed his slippers, and, tearing out the hair from his head, vowed that they should cause him no more mischief; and, so saying, he took a spade, and digging a hole in his garden, buried them there.

One of his neighbours, however, who had borne him a grudge for a long time, perceived him turning up the earth, and ran and told the governor that Cassem had dug up a treasure in his garden. This was enough to excite the cupidity of the officer, and he sent forthwith for Cassem. In vain our miser declared that he had not found money, that he was only employed in burying his slippers. The governor had calculated on his bribe, and the afflicted and slipper-haunted Cassem could only regain his liberty by paying down a second large sum.

Our friend, in an extremity of despair, anathematised his slippers, and went and threw them into an aqueduct at some distance from the city, thinking that this time he should hear no more of them. But, the slippers somehow found their way just to the very pipe of the aqueduct, by this means preventing the flowing of the water.

The persons who were responsible for the care of the aqueduct, having gone to ascertain the cause of the stoppage and to remove it, carried Cassem's slippers to the governor of the city, declaring them to be the cause of all the injury. Their unfortunate owner was thrown again into prison, and condemned to pay a larger fine than before.

The governor who had punished the offence, and who pretended to be indebted to no one for anything, returned Cassem's precious slippers to him again most faithfully; and Cassem, in order to free himself from all the evils which they had brought upon him, resolved to burn them. As they were saturated with water, he first of all put them out to dry in the sun on the terrace of his house. But Cassem's evil genius had not yet quite done with his tricks, and the last which he played him was the worst of all.

A neighbour's dog prowling along the terrace on the house-tops, spied out the slippers, and, darting at them, carried off one of them. As, however, the dog was playing with it, and tossing it about, he contrived to let it fall off the terrace on to the head of a woman who happened to be passing below.

The fright and the violence of the blow made the poor woman quite ill; and, her husband having carried his complaint before the Cadi, Cassem was condemned to pay a fine, proportionate to the misfortune of which he had been the cause.

Going home, he took up his slippers, and returned to the Cadi with them in his hands. "My lord," he exclaimed, with a vehemence which excited the judge's laughter; "my lord, look at the fatal cause of all my troubles.

"These slippers have now reduced me to poverty; be pleased now to issue a decree, in order that the misfortunes which they will, no doubt, still continue to occasion may not be imputed to me."

The Cadi could not refuse to comply with this request, and Cassem learned, at great expense, the danger there is in not changing one's slippers often enough.

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Printed and Published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON, at "Pearson's Weekly" Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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DESPISE NO MESSENGER.

IN a great monarchy no subject can tell what other man may or may not be a messenger from the king. Angels of mercy seldom carry harps and arrive amidst radiant light and a vast flapping of wings. It may be a little child who shall bring you the longed-for good news, or, as in the case of Mrs. Charlotte Davis, it may be a quiet old lady who drops in to make an ordinary friendly call.

And help was badly needed, as it always is when pain and illness crush these frail bodies of ours as the rushes bend and bow before the swollen stream. Referring to the old lady's call Mrs. Davis draws aside the curtain from an experience of the summer of 1878. She says: "I fell into a condition that was strange and new to me. I didn't know how to account for it, nor could I tell what it was going to lead to. I had always a bad taste in the mouth, and was constantly retching and spitting up a sour fluid. The sense and feeling of it were horrible. My appetite failed until food had no attraction for me. Even after taking the least morsel I had great pain at the chest and under the shoulder blades. But the complaint seemed to be seated more particularly in the stomach. There the pain was very keen and violent. Sometimes it felt like a knife cutting me asunder. I got no rest day or night, and was confined to my bed for weeks together. Inasmuch as I could take no solid nourishment I grew weaker and weaker as the weary time dragged by. Indeed my only food was milk and soda water."

[We may remark at this point that Mrs. Davis's entire digestive system was, at the time she speaks of, dangerously deranged. The failure of the appetite was a signal indicating that the presence of food in the stomach could not be tolerated. As it could not be digested it would only serve to aggravate the inflammation which was raging there. Such a state of things is bad as possible. The very source of all power and life was virtually paralysed. We must eat in order to live, and yet—in such a case—to eat is only to invite additional suffering and to bid for a more speedy death. Hence the terror of that ailment, which some silly people (*who have never had it*) speak of as "only an attack of indigestion and dyspepsia." Would they allude to an inhabited dwelling wrapped in flames as "Only a house on fire"?]

Mrs. Davis, and plenty of others whom we know, are able to rebuke that addlepated sort of talk.

She continues: "The doctor who attended me said I had inflammation, caused by gall stones."

[Very likely. Gall stones are composed of bile sand, which is carried into the gall bladder and then adheres until the larger stones or masses are formed. The bile has stagnated, owing to the poisons from the stomach acting on the liver, until this painful and dangerous complication results. In other words, gall stones mean biliousness, and biliousness means indigestion and dyspepsia.]

But let us listen again to the lady: "I lay in great agony," she says, "week after week, during which time I passed two gall stones. The doctor's treatment gave me no relief, and what I suffered for over a year is indescribable. One day *an old lady called at my house*, and seeing my condition, strongly urged me to take Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. I said, 'Yes, of course, I'll take anything that will help me.' After the first bottle I passed a third stone, but *this time without pain*. I kept on with the Syrup and was soon as well as ever. Since that time, now fourteen years ago, I have kept in good health and perfectly free from my old ailment. I will answer inquiries from any sufferer. Yours, &c. (Signed) Charlotte Davis, 8, Edithna Street, Stockwell, London, September 27th, 1893."

"The first bringer of unwelcome news," says Shakespeare, "hath but a losing office." Quite true, but the messenger who tells of help and rescue wins a better place in our memory. Does he not? Yes, say all of us.

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Dear Sir,—It may interest you to know that we had practical illustration of the efficacy of your "Minnow" Life Belts last evening. We were struck by a heavy squall and upset whilst racing, but having, in accordance with our club rules, life belts on, in this case of your make, we suffered nothing but a little inconvenience, such as naturally arises from getting wet, and this even was partial, as your belts floated us so high, that, we were practically dry from a little above the waist up.

Yours truly, J. F. JELLICO, "Dever," N.B.S.C.

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Age last Birthday.	The Combined Experience Table Per Year.	£400. Average Cost of £400 in British Assurance Companies Per Year.	I.O.F. Table of Premiums Per Year.	Annual Saving to Members of the I.O.F.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
21	3 1 6	8 1 4	3 12 0	4 9 4
25	3 4 10	8 16 4	3 16 0	5 0 4
30	3 10 4	10 0 4	4 0 0	6 0 4
35	3 17 6	11 9 4	4 12 0	6 17 4
40	4 6 4	13 6 4	5 0 0	8 6 4
45	5 1 10	15 13 8	6 9 0	9 13 8
49	6 12 10	18 3 4	7 16 0	10 7 4

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